

## Tips for Parents: Gifted . . . and Teenagers, too!

by Jim Delisle

Although parents of gifted children remain concerned about meeting their kids' intellectual, emotional and social needs throughout their lives, it's probably safe to say that as gifted children become teenagers, most parents loosen the strings of concern just a little bit. Hey, it's natural: as our children become young adults, we trust them to make some choices independently that, earlier, they needed our guidance to decide.

Still, it is the errant parent who is not tethered to their gifted teen at least loosely throughout high school, and beyond. Although our kids may be loathe to admit it, they need us as much as they did in kindergarten; they simply need us in different ways.

I've listed below several strategies gleaned from parents of highly gifted kids as to how they addressed issues that arose at home, in school and with friends. Their collective experiences represent how we can help when our kids are gifted . . .and teenagers, too.

**Accept that wanting to be perceived as "normal" is . . . normal!** There are times in one's life when it's easy to be the "smart kid", and other times when that moniker is best downplayed. The middle school years may be a time when a child wants to be known for fitting in rather than sticking out. A vast majority of the time, this is a temporary port in the emotional sea of early adolescence. Once high school arrives, you'll recognize your gifted son or daughter once again.

**The greater the force, the stronger the resistance.** OK . . .let's be honest: you cannot force a reluctant teenager to do anything, at least not for long. Teens have their own personal



agendas, many of which tie into their newly found sense of power and independence. Punishments and contracts seldom work with gifted teenagers--coercion never does!--but honest discussions about the importance of balance in one's life is a great place to begin planting the seeds of personal responsibility. A weekly time with your teen may help you connect in meaningful ways.

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### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

In this issue we take a look at how parents can continue the learning at home. We hope you find some useful information to guide you on your journey in parenting a gifted child.

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- AISD's College Corner
- How Parents Can Support Gifted Children

## Finding the Glory– On and Off the Playing Field

By Linda C. Neumann

On the school athletic field, it seems that everyone expects and reveres top-level performance. A common expectation is that schools will offer special programs and opportunities to help athletes develop and hone their abilities in competition. Equally common is allocating money in the education budget to athletic programs, facilities, and equipment.



“The athletically gifted, in our society and in almost all cultures across the globe, are highly respected, looked up to, and even admired for their athletic gifts,” says SENG board member Steven Pfeiffer, a psychologist and professor at Florida State University.

Pfeiffer observed what he considers to be this striking difference in treatment between athletically and intellectually gifted students when he served as a sport psychologist for the women’s soccer program at Duke University. According to Pfeiffer, he discovered similarities as well as differences between the two groups of gifted students.

One of the most important similarities he found is that all children fortunate enough to have a gift-athletic, academic, or artistic- require the same basics to reach their potential: good teachers, hard work over an extended period of time, and often a mentor to guide them. He observes, “No matter what the gift, natural ability alone rarely, if ever, leads to full actualization of one’s talent. This lesson is often a difficult one for both the highly gifted athlete and the highly gifted student to accept! Whether it’s long hours spent on the playing field and in the weight room or it’s long hours spent in the physics lab, one needs to put in the time and commit to sweat and hard work to accomplish big goals!”

Parents of academically gifted children are often focused on how to provide their own gifted son or daughter with a more challenging and intellectually stimulating classroom experience. “This makes a lot of sense,” explains Pfeiffer, “but if the parent pushes too hard or in a way that antagonizes others, the outcome may not be beneficial for the gifted child.” To avoid this situation, Pfeiffer asks parents to think about how they would like others to describe their son or daughter in the future- to focus on the long-range goals, wishes, expectations, and fear the parents have for their gifted child. With this shift in focus, according to Pfeiffer, “parental concerns quickly take on a new, different, and, I would argue, very important slant- a slant well-worth discussing.”

The discussion of long-range and short-term goals becomes even more interesting and productive when teachers and gifted students join in. It can help all parties re-frame their view of a child, and it can help parents and teachers formulate a new set of long-range goals to consider as they address immediate, unmet academic needs.

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Partnerships such as those that Pfeiffer's discussions help forge between parents and educators can help minimize the differences between the treatment that athletically gifted and the academically gifted students receive. But what about the glory? What can academically gifted students do that will bring them the rewards and recognition that those who excel athletically often receive? The answer is competition, and there are plenty of competitions open to those who excel in areas such as mathematics, science, geography, writing, and the arts. Academic competition might lead not to only glory, but to scholarships as well!

**Permission Statement**

Modified from Neumann, L. (2008). Finding Glory- On and Off the Playing Field

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**Check out these resources for academic competitions:**

- The Educator's Reference Desk: [http://www.eduref.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi/Resources/Educational\\_Levels/K-12\\_Education/Academic\\_Achievement/Academic\\_Competitions.html](http://www.eduref.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi/Resources/Educational_Levels/K-12_Education/Academic_Achievement/Academic_Competitions.html)
- John Hopkins University- Center for Talented Youth, Links to Academic Competitions: <http://cty.jhu.edu/imagine/linkb.htm>
- Hoagies Gifted Education Page- Contests and Awards: <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/contests.htm>
- Duke University Talent Identification Program- Academic Competitions Page: [http://www.duketipeog.com/home/academic\\_activities](http://www.duketipeog.com/home/academic_activities)
- Northern Kentucky University- P-12 Student Resources, Math and Science Competition Links: <http://www.nku.edu/~mathed/p12sr.html>

**Are you having conversations with your gifted child about college?**

Check out the **College Corner** section of our department website for helpful information. This site includes a rationale for attending college, useful publications and websites for parents, students, and counselors, and the district's scholarship search engine.



You can find it at: <http://www.austinisd.org/academics/curriculum/gt/college.phtml>

### *Tips for Parents...Continued from Page 1*

**Allow natural consequences.** OK . . . so your child didn't turn in homework and is now frantically completing it two days before the semester ends. You could call the teachers or counselor and explain about the hectic pace of your teen's life that prevented on-time completion of work . . . but don't do it. This "rescue" ultimately hurts teens more than it helps, as it makes them dependent on you in ways that both you and they thought they'd outgrown. Instead, let this situation be a reminder of the importance of organization, scheduling and prioritizing.



**Continue to be a parent.** When it comes to all of those topics parents and teens are often uncomfortable to address honestly don't talk yourself into believing that "my smart kid will make the right decisions." Without your guidance, that's no more likely than it is for any other teenager. Don't assume that intellectual maturity guarantees good decision making in the heat of a social situation.

Are there secrets to raising gifted teenagers to become responsible adults? The real secret is no secret at all: open communication that is undergirded with a true respect for the individual your teenager is today, and the adults they are becoming all-too-soon.

#### **Permission Statement**

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**Did you know that you can read past issues of the AISD GT Express? Just check out the following link on our department website for other issues.**

<http://www.austinisd.org/academics/curriculum/gt/parentcorner.phtml>



## How Parents Can Support Gifted Children

by Linda Silverman

Raising and nurturing a gifted child can be an exciting yet daunting challenge. Unfortunately these complicated little people do not come with instruction manuals.

Gifted children develop cognitively at a much faster rate than they develop physically and emotionally, posing some interesting problems. For example, ideas forged by 8-year-old minds may be difficult to produce with 5-year-old hands. Further, advanced cognition often makes gifted children aware of information that they are not yet emotionally ready to handle. They tend to experience all of life with greater intensity, rendering them emotionally complex. These children usually do not fit the developmental norms for their age; they have more advanced play interests and often are academically far ahead of their age peers.

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### *How Parents Can Support Gifted Children...Continued from Page 4*

Children learn first from their parents. Parents who spend time with their gifted child are more able to tune in to their child's interests and respond by offering appropriate educational enrichment opportunities. It is important that parents read to their children frequently, even when the children are capable of reading to themselves. In the early years, parents can help their children discover their personal interests, expose their children to their own interests, and encourage their children to learn about a wide variety of subjects such as art, nature, music, museum, and sports. Children who are attracted to a particular area need opportunities to explore that field in depth. Home stimulation and support of interests is vital to the development of talents. Following the lead of the child will help the child flourish.

Gifted children often can exhaust and overwhelm a new mother and father. Gifted infants often sleep less than other babies and require extra stimulation when they are awake. It is helpful to have extended family in the home, grandparents who live nearby, a close community of friends or relatives, or a teenager in the neighborhood who can spend some time with the child.

From the time they can talk, gifted children are constantly asking questions and often challenge authority. "Do it because I said so" doesn't work with these children. Generally, parents who take the time to explain requests get more cooperation than do more authoritarian parents. If these children are spoken to and listened to with consideration and respect, they tend to respond respectfully.

As children get older, a family meeting can be a good way of sharing responsibility and learning negotiation skills. Family meetings can provide a forum where children have a

voice as a family member, and provide avenues for avoiding power struggles that otherwise can occur. It is important for gifted children to feel emotionally supported by the family, even when there are disagreements.

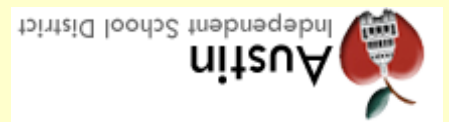


The key to raising gifted children is respect: respect for their uniqueness, respect for their opinions and ideas, respect for their dreams. Gifted children need parents who are responsive and flexible, who will go to bat for them when they are too young to do so for themselves. It is painful for parents to watch their children feeling out of sync with others, but it is unwise to emphasize too greatly the importance of fitting in. Children get enough of that message in the outside world. At home, children need to know that their uniqueness is cherished and that they are appreciated as persons just for being themselves.

This article is excerpted from the updated version of the 1992 ERIC Digest *How Can Parents Support Gifted Children?*, written by Linda Kreger Silverman of the Gifted Child Development Center. It has been updated by Sandra Berger of the [Eric Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education](#).

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